

Dream Jobs: Bridge painter

By Erlend Clouston, The Guardian, adapted by Newsela staff on 12.21.16

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TOP: A bridge worker using a walkie-talkie under a suspension bridge. Getty Images.

There is a bridge in Scotland that looks like a big red spiderweb over the water. It is called the Forth Bridge. Every day, 200 trains cross over the bridge. Painters like Bob Muir must protect it from salt, frost and snow.

"It's my life," says Muir, who is 39 years old.

Muir does not talk much, but he knows he works in a special place. His job as a bridge painter is to keep the bridge sturdy. This will help to keep it from falling into the water. It takes a lot of strong paint. The bridge is more than a mile long.

Safety Is Always Most Important

It is time to take a close-up look at the bridge. But first, we talk about safety. There is a long list of rules. One long blast of the horn means a train is coming. Three blasts means there is danger approaching quickly.

The bridge was built more than 100 years ago. The workers had a dangerous job. It was not easy and dozens of them died. Since 2002, there has been only one small accident. Still, things can go wrong.

Muir's brother Michael also works on the bridge. He is a grit-blaster, which means he removes dirt with powerful tools. Muir's stepson works on the bridge, too. They all have dangerous jobs. The bridge is very high above the water. Muir says the work is safer than it used to be.

You Can Almost See Forever

I ask Muir about the views from the bridge. "They are amazing," he says. "Not that I have much time on my hands" to look for very long.

I move closer to the edge of the bridge and gaze along the horizon. Muir is right. I can report there is still an awful lot of bridge to paint.

Job Stats

Pay: \$13 an hour.

Hours: Muir works four days a week, starting at 7:30 a.m. and finishing at 5:30 p.m.

Work-life balance: "No problems."

Best thing: "The satisfaction of seeing a job well done."

Worst thing: "That's easy – the weather. If it rains, you can't paint, and if it is windy we have to come off the bridge."

Overtime

Muir brings his lunch from home. "Tomato soup and steak pie is my favorite." In his free time, he likes to relax by going fishing – but not near the bridge where he works.